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ABSTRACT

Using a stratified random sample of 300 Syracuse University instructors, assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors, this study examined the belief that university faculty members view continuing education with disfavor, and analyzed some differences in faculty attitudes. Subjects were sent a 35 item questionnaire to which they responded on a continuum from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The 35 statements were then categorized by attitudes toward administration, students, instruction, purposes, and programs. Responses were mainly favorable; "purposes" ranked highest, followed by programs, students, instruction, and administration. Variances included the following: (1) women were more favorably disposed than men, instructors more so than professors, those involved in research more than those not involved, faculty in noncredit programs more than those in strictly credit programs, and faculty members in professional schools more than liberal arts faculty; (2) faculty with no teaching experience reacted more favorably than faculty with various levels of experience. (author/ly)

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FACULTY COMMITMENT TO SELECTED ASPECTS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

Problem

Much has been written about the low regard for continuing education programs in higher education but little hard fact is known. The literature is cluttered with comments suggesting that educational activities for adults carry low esteem in the minds of critical groups in the academic community. Since practically all these comments are undocumented, it was decided to examine the negative claims by setting up a design for assessing the attitudes of one group in the academic environment. The attitudes of faculty members seemed most appropriate to explore because of their crucial role in determining the success of any educational program. Therefore, the two major purposes of the investigation were:

1) To examine the belief that university faculty members view continuing education with disfavor.

2) To examine some of the attitudinal differences among faculty members toward continuing education.

Significance

The concern for marginality among adult educators stems from the fact that their operations are located in institutions which are primarily concerned with other tasks. The resulting feelings of inferiority have no doubt thwarted progress and prevented adult educators from fully understanding and performing their many functions. If the faculty of an institution lacks

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sympathy for the purposes and programs of adult education, the gap created by the marginality will widen. Without the support of the faculty, few activities can attain significant goals. If a negative attitude pattern exists among faculty members, it will be reinforced regularly. Although numerous studies have been conducted that prove the adult's ability is at least equal to his younger counterpart, the feeling exists that the adult is not as capable. This feeling may lead some instructors to water down the subject matter in their adult classes which results in less than adequate achievement. Then when the achievement is compared with that of their younger counterparts, the adult ends up at the lower end of the comparison. The influence of faculty attitudes has another important dimension. Since the formation of a philosophy of life-long learning among adult students is an accepted objective, the question of faculty influence on student attitudes is a significant issue. There is little doubt that teachers at any level of education are highly influential in the attitude development of their students. It must follow that if a faculty member displays a negative attitude toward the continuing education college in which he is teaching that it may influence the general attitude of some students toward life-long learning.

There is an urgency today for breakthroughs in knowledge about attitudes. The adult educator has many questions about attitudes that need to be answered but there is a definite lack of research on attitudes as they apply to continuing education.

Questions

1) In answer to the first purpose of the study, what are the attitudes of faculty members toward the continuing education college's administration, instruction, programs, purposes and students?

2) In response to the second purpose of the study, are there attitudinal differences among faculty members related to age, sex, rank, department, college, method of compensation, research involvement, types of teaching experience, amount of teaching experience and years at the institution.

Limitations

This investigation was based on a sample drawn from just one institution. It was an investigation of the attitudes of Syracuse University faculty members toward their continuing education college. For this reason, the results may not be widely applicable. Replication of the study in other institutions may show attitudinal differences related to philosophy, organization and size of the continuing education college. In addition, although the instrument used for collecting the data was exposed to the appropriate tests for validity and reliability, the responses of the faculty members on the attitude questionnaire can only be assumed to represent their actual beliefs and feelings.

Sample

If generalizations are made on the basis of an attitude measuring device, the sample must be representative. In order to secure a representative sample for this investigation, a stratified random sample of three hundred faculty members was taken from the population of eight hundred forty-two individuals with the ranks of Instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor. It was decided to include only the four ranks since several individuals in the lower ranks were not full-time appointments or they were still studying for their own degrees. The sample size of three hundred was considered necessary to yield an adequate range of perceptions necessary for the statistical treatment of the data.

Instrumentation

There has been considerable discussion over the merits of different types of attitude scales currently in use in educational and psychological research. The method of summated ratings was selected for this study because, compared with other techniques, it is less laborious but still correlates well with other scales. The summated rating scale consists of several attitude statements to which subjects respond with degrees of agreement or disagreement. Each item is considered to be approximately the same value as any other item. Values are assigned to each different position on a scale so that on a five point scale the values one to five are used. The one value is always assigned to the negative end while the five value is placed on the positive side. The scores of the items are summed to determine an individual's score and place him somewhere on an agreement-disagreement continuum.

After an extensive review of the literature regarding criticisms of adult education activities, approximately fifty statements were devised and edited. The editing involved caution against the use of factual statements, double negative, ambiguity, complex sentences, misleading terms and a variety of other criteria for appropriate statements. The statements were then submitted to five judges who were asked to examine each item. An attempt was made to state approximately half of the items negatively and others positively. They were also placed in random order to minimize possible response set which can be generated if only favorable or only unfavorable statements are included. The reliability of the instrument was examined after a pilot study was conducted. The reliability coefficient, based on a derivative of the Kuder Richardson formula 20, was .84. The pilot study was also used as a means of measuring the strength of each item. For the item analysis,

a Pearson Product Moment Correlation was computed for each of the items. This measured the relationship between the responses of the subjects to each item and their scores on the total test. Taking into consideration the comments and editing suggestions of the judges and the results of the item analysis, thirty-five statements were used in the final scale.

The thirty-five attitude statements were broken down into five categories of seven items designed to measure attitudes toward administration, students, instruction, programs and purposes. Under the heading of administration were topics such as pragmatism, creativity, personnel, salary philosophy and efficiency. The areas tapped under the rubric of instruction were motivation, grading, prestige of teaching adults, methodology and standards. Students were examined by such topics as their ability, experience, interest, guidance, motivation and achievement. Under the category of purposes were topics of liberal education, community involvement, action programs and societal problems. Finally areas tapped under the heading of programs were credit courses, prestige, non-credit activities, superficiality and degree quality.

Collection of data

The thirty-five item questionnaire, ten biographical questions, a cover letter and return addressed envelope were distributed through campus mail to the sample. An identification number was placed on each questionnaire as a means of identifying non-respondents so that follow-up letters could be sent. Approximately two weeks after the first mailing, a follow-up letter was sent to each of the non-respondents requesting their cooperation. Finally, three weeks later, another follow-up letter, an additional copy of the questionnaire and a stamped pre-addressed envelope were sent to the non-respondents by first class mail.

Analysis of data

Of the two hundred seventy-three returns, two hundred forty-three were usable for the statistical treatment. The responses and biographical data were coded on IBM 503 answer sheets. The coded answer sheets were then submitted to an IBM 1230 Optical Mark Scoring Reader which read off the information and punched the data on IBM 5081 standard cards. Then, with the aid of the IBM 360 Model 50, appropriate statistical techniques were employed to determine the significance of the results. A simple "t" test was used to compare the differences between the means of each attitude category and neutral points. The two sample Hotelling T^2 technique was used to compare differences between means for biographical information with two factors, such as sex. When three factors were compared, the one way analysis of variance method was used to compare the means.

Findings

When compared with the neutral point it was found that each of the five categories was in the favorable direction at the .01 level of confidence. Based on the mean score, the purposes category was highest followed in order by programs, students, instruction and administration.

Female faculty rated continuing education more favorably than males in three of the categories. The students, programs and instruction categories were all significant at the .01 level of confidence. Faculty with research involvement in adult education were significantly more favorable in three categories. The difference in the purpose category was at the .01 level of confidence while the differences in the programs and administration categories were at the .05 level. Only one significant difference resulted from comparing faculty members involved only in courses for credit and those

who taught non-credit courses. It was found that those with non-credit teaching experience were more favorable at the .05 level. The faculty members who had been compensated on an overload basis were compared with those who were paid as part of their regular load. The administration category was viewed more favorably by faculty members on an overload arrangement while the instruction category was viewed more favorably by those teaching on a part-of-load arrangement. Both differences were significant at the .05 level of confidence.

No significant differences were found in the comparison between the ratings of faculty members from the Social Sciences and Humanities with the faculty of the Natural Sciences. However, faculty from the professional schools such as Journalism, Education, Business and Law rated significantly higher than faculty from the Liberal Arts in the categories of programs, purposes and instruction--all at the .01 level.

No significant differences were found related to age or years at Syracuse University. In terms of semesters of teaching experience with adults, two significant differences were observed at the .05 level. Faculty with no experience rated more favorably in their attitudes toward students than those with four to six semesters of teaching. In addition, those with no experience rated the instruction category higher than those in the one to three semesters of teaching group. Finally, one significant difference resulted from an examination by faculty rank. Instructors rated the instruction category more favorably than professors at the .01 level of confidence.

Discussion

Looking at all five categories collectively, the issue raised by the first purpose of the study has received some illumination. On the basis of

the thirty-five items used to collect the data, there was a definite tendency toward favorable reactions and approval of Syracuse University's continuing education college. The reasons for the acceptance are no doubt complex. It is hoped that the favorable reaction is typical of a trend toward greater appreciation and acceptance of the importance of educating adults. The response may also represent something of a testament to the quality of continuing education at Syracuse University. However, it should be remembered that although the positive attitudes are encouraging, they don't represent total endorcement. If continuing education is going to be a primary responsibility of higher education, it must continue to make efforts toward strengthening its effectiveness.

In terms of sex, the findings reinforce previous research which concluded that females generally have a more favorable attitude or appear more inclined to support adult education. However, it is possible that female attitudes would incline more favorably toward all aspects of education.

Since faculty involved in research were more favorable and since faculty with non-credit teaching experience showed greater support, it may be concluded that the kind of involvement is related to positive attitudes rather than the amount of involvement. This statement was supported by the outcome which showed that those faculty members with no teaching experience in adult education reacted more favorably than those with various amounts of experience.

The different directions related to method of compensation was a surprise result. The more favorable rating of instruction by the part-of-load faculty may possibly be attributed to greater ego involvement since they may feel more a part of the instructional staff than overload teachers.

The findings which showed greater support by the Professional School faculty over Liberal Arts confirms the findings of other investigations. It might be attributed to the pragmatic orientation of Professional School faculty. By the nature of the purposes of Professional Schools, which is to prepare people for specific positions or vocations, it may well be that continuing education (which is pragmatically based) would receive greater support from individuals with similar orientations.

The more favorable response by Instructors over Professors supports some previous findings that showed lower ranking faculty tend to support adult education more than senior members.

Further research

1) Since females were more favorably disposed toward continuing education in this investigation, it would be of interest to examine whether females tend to have higher attitudinal ratings toward most other educational activities.

2) Replication of the entire study with other continuing education colleges would validate conclusions and provide useful data for other institutions.

3) More detailed breakdowns of the biographical variables such as college, department, age and experience might yield more useful information if such research were replicated.

4) Since the area of continuing education encompasses so many dimensions, it might prove fruitful to explore an in-depth attitudinal survey of a specific facet of adult education such as limited residence degree programs, community involvement, grading standards or any number of other possibilities.

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